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Item 6 (e) of the provisional agenda

**The “Environment for Europe” mid-term review of the Astana Conference
main outcomes: environmental assessment and reporting**

Proposed coordination mechanism for the development of the Shared Environmental Information System

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) ECE ministers decided to establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) across the region in order to keep the pan-European environment under review (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1, para. 14).

In line with that mandate, the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy recommended that the Committee consider establishing a SEIS coordination mechanism in the form of a group of “Friends of SEIS”, in which the main SEIS stakeholders would be expected to participate, with a view to strengthening the Committee’s work on SEIS at the political level, as well as the work of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment at the technical level (ECE/CEP/2013/22, para. 32).

At the request of the Bureau, the secretariat prepared the present document, containing the draft terms of reference for such a group, for the Committee to consider with a view to its adoption.

Background

1. At the Seventh “Environment for Europe” (EfE) Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) Ministers decided to establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) across the region in order to keep the pan-European environment under review. It was agreed that the SEIS should serve multiple policy processes, including the multilateral environmental agreements, and include the building of capacity of countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to monitor and assess their environment. Ministers invited the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its partners to develop an outline for how these actions could be performed and to present it to Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1, para. 14).

2. According to the EEA document on the matter submitted to the nineteenth session of CEP (ECE/CEP/2013/15), the implementation of SEIS and its principles across the pan-European region is already taking place. With different speeds, in various ways and gradually engaging diverse target groups, the exchange of environmental information, their reuse and dissemination is growing. EEA proposes that the focus of future actions should, in the first phase at least, be oriented towards countries, with the international and regional partners supporting this process by facilitating the cooperation and the exchange of knowledge between countries and adding, whenever possible, additional environmental dimensions (regional, global) to the national perspectives. Moreover, EEA stresses the need to bring together and connect all existing and planned initiatives across the region (*ibid.*, paras. 45, 46 and 49)

3. The CEP Bureau considered the issue of SEIS development at its meeting on 29 April 2013 (see ECE/CEP/2013/22, paras. 26–33). In this regard, the Bureau deliberated on various possible solutions to facilitate the development of SEIS across the region and to ensure the active involvement of all concerned partners. It agreed that SEIS was one of the most important outcomes of the Astana Ministerial Conference and that progress in its development should be reported at the next EfE conference. To strengthen the work on SEIS development by CEP at the political level, as well as by the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment at the technical level, the Bureau recommended that CEP consider establishing a SEIS coordination mechanism in the form of a group of “Friends of SEIS” in which the main SEIS stakeholders would be expected to participate. The CEP Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare draft terms of reference for such a group for consideration by CEP at its nineteenth session.

4. Following the request of the CEP Bureau, the secretariat, in consultation with the CEP Chair, prepared the draft terms of reference for a Group of Friends of SEIS, annexed to the present document, for the consideration of CEP and prospective adoption.

Annex

Terms of reference for the Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System

1. Ministers decided at the Seventh “Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) to establish a regular process of environmental assessment and to develop a Shared Environment Information System (SEIS) across the region in order to keep the pan-European environment under review. These terms of reference define the modalities of a coordination mechanism, in the form of a Group of Friends of the Shared Environmental Information System (Friends of SEIS).

2. The main purpose of this mechanism is to provide a platform for the exchange of information about ongoing and planned activities relevant to SEIS development, and to build synergies among and join the efforts of the main interested stakeholders.

3. Friends of SEIS will be led by the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP). The following bodies and organizations are invited to nominate members to the Group:

- (a) The CEP Bureau;
- (b) The Bureau of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment;
- (c) Governing or subsidiary bodies of relevant United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements;
- (d) The European Environment Agency;
- (e) The United Nations Environment Programme;
- (f) The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe;
- (g) The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development;
- (h) The Regional Environmental Centres;
- (i) The European ECO Forum.

ECE member States are invited to nominate their members to the Group, based on a balanced geographical representation. The CEP Chair may decide to invite representatives of other bodies and organizations, as necessary.

4. Friends of SEIS will meet when necessary (once a year on average). Preferably, the Group’s meetings will be organized back to back to meetings of other bodies (e.g., CEP, the CEP Bureau, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment). The Group shall keep its meetings to the minimum necessary and shall work as much as possible by electronic means (e.g., e-mail, teleconference).

5. At its first meeting, Friends of SEIS will agree on a plan of their concrete activities. Such a plan shall take into account SEIS-related developments, including, among others, the SEIS-related documents submitted to the nineteenth session of CEP (ECE/CEP/2013/15, ECE/CEP/2013/18, and ECE/CEP/2013/13).

6. Friends of SEIS will be serviced by the ECE secretariat. Conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Geneva will be provided for the meetings of Friends of SEIS. The working language will be English.

7. Donors will be invited to support the work of Friends of SEIS, including the travel of eligible members, as well as, in case of need, the travel of ECE staff to participate in and support the organization of meetings held outside of Geneva.
 8. These terms of reference will cover the biennium 2014–2015. CEP may decide to extend them at its session in late 2015.
 9. The Friends of SEIS will regularly inform CEP on the implementation of its mandate.
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